

House Republican Press Release

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STILL Not Paying Attention?



By State Representative John J. Ryan

You have probably noticed recurring themes of this regular column that it is not difficult to actually monitor what goes on at our State Capitol, and that you, as a taxpayer and voter, would be well advised to pay attention to how politicians vote on legislation. This, of course, is opposed to the marketing hype, (typically filled with deceptive legislative “buzzwords”) that have unfortunately become the most important output of many elected officials.

A good example is the unending topic of school funding, meaning the State's contribution towards somehow equalizing the educational quality for students in individual municipalities. The commencement of this year's Session was no different than every other year, with earnest sounding proclamations that "this year we will be doing something about fair funding for our children" not to mention "bringing more money back from Hartford for our local schools," and it sounds great, right ? Except when you take a look at what **really** happens.....

You might be interested in comparing such political rhetoric with Senate Bill 434, with the harmless sounding title "An Act Concerning Funding for Equal Educational Opportunity", (now who could object to a pleasant sounding purpose as that ?) which was raised this year by the Education Committee. Since you are now adept at going to the Connecticut General Assembly website (www.cga.ct.gov), you look up this bill and note that it was voted out by the Committee last week, but what does it say?

You then see language referring to "base aid ratio" and "net current expenditures per student" and you are correct, the bill is tough to decipher. While I had my very definite suspicions about this one, I wanted to make certain that (not being a member of the Education Committee myself), I interpreted SB 434 correctly, so I asked one of our highly-qualified staff people for a translation, and as I suspected, this is what the bill actually does :

- It changes the ECS (Educational Cost Sharing formula - the main vehicle for State funding to local schools) by **ELIMINATING** the minimum grant for wealthier towns. That's right; wealthier towns would get **NOTHING** at all from the \$1.6 billion fund.

- And it creates a new \$46 million fund paid for by a dozen wealthy towns

Now let's try some audience participation here:

- Guess where those 12 ("wealthy") towns are located ? (if you guessed that the majority are from lower Fairfield County - well, you win what is behind Curtain # 1 !)
- Would you guess that a projection might be that Darien, New Canaan, Westport, Greenwich, etc. each would pay out more than an additional \$3 million a year? (you win again!)
- Could you guess that the only four communities that would receive more than an additional \$3 million each are New Haven, Bridgeport, Waterbury and Hartford ? (I am going to be impressed if you are 3 for 3 here!)

And as a regular column reader, you must be well aware that there is already a very large disparity in what the lower Fairfield County communities send to Hartford as opposed to the small amounts that they get back through the income tax, conveyance tax, and of course last year's newly added estate tax. Of course, this new funding would be on top of all that!

I do not suggest that any responsible government does not accept the principal that those who have more are fairly obligated to do more, but as a responsible consumer (i.e. taxpayer/voter) don't you think you should have some idea of where your funds are coming from, where they are going to, the magnitude of the disparities, and the trending of these disparities?

- So for our final segment today of audience participation: Would you care to venture a guess as to how this got out of the Education Committee (meaning who voted)? You can look it up (and every other General Assembly roll call vote for that matter) and you would note that **everyone** who voted for SB 434 was from one political team, and **everyone** who voted against SB 434 was from the other; guess which was which?

We can give you quite a few further examples, but we hope you get the idea that there is a considerable disparity, to put it politely, between what is proclaimed in press releases and what actually transpires, and it is no one's fault but your own if you are not following and participating in the legislative process. Will SB 434 go anywhere from here, or will it die a quiet (and well-deserved death) by never being called in the House or Senate for a vote?

As they said in the old days of radio: Stay tuned!

Please feel free to contact me with your concerns and issues. As your state representative, it is my job, and my priority to represent you and to make sure that your needs and concerns are addressed at the capitol. You can write to me at Room 4200, Legislative

Office Building, Hartford, CT 06106-1591, send me e-mail at
John.Ryan@housegop.state.ct.us or call my office toll-free at 1-800-842-1423.